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REFORM TRACTS---NO. 5.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

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Christian Communion is the fellowship of Christians with each other; and the highest act, and closest visible tie, of that fellowship, is partaking together of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Wesleyan Methodist and Free Presbyterian denominations are principally composed of persons whose consciences would not let them commune with slave-holders; and in obedience to the demands of conscience, left the churches with which they were formerly connected, and formed or joined the bodies above named.

They contend that the Apostle Paul, in the 5th chapter of his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, forbids Christians partaking of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, with certain offenders; such as Idolaters, Liars, Extortioners, etc., etc.; and that slave-holders are extortioners of the very worst

kind ; and that for this reason, if for no other, the bread of Christian fellowship must not be eaten with them. We regard their argument on this subject as complete and unanswerable ; and these new denominations as productions of consciences enlightened by the Holy Scriptures, the outgrowths of correct Christian principle.

But taking their position for granted, what is duty in regard to communion with members of churches which admit slave-holders to membership? If it be wrong to commune with slaveholders, it must be equally wrong to commune in churches which admit slaveholders to communion or membership, for the members are the church, and when we commune in the church we commune with its members, and those it admits with us to communion.

But what is a church ? A church is a collective body of Christians united together for the worship of God. It may be large or small. This body is one in fellowship and church rites and ceremonies. Some churches embrace but a single locality, others a whole state or nation. There is but one Old School Presbyterian Church in the United States. This is also true of the Methodist Episcopal and some other churches of this nation.— Membership in one place is membership in every place. These churches have many congregations or societies, but they compose but one church of the denomination of which they are parts. Mem-

bership in any congregation or society is membership, not only in that congregation or society, but in the church of which it is a part. Individual congregations or societies say who shall and who shall not be members of the whole body, in the matter of admissions. To commune in any of these congregations or societies is to commune with the whole church of which they are parts.

Christians, and only Christians, have a right to enjoy Christian communion. They, and they only, belong to the household of faith—the house of God. But who are to determine who have these rights, and who have them not? who are Christians and who are not? The church at Corinth was expressly forbidden to commune with certain persons, guilty of certain crimes. The church was the judge in the case then, and that right is still with it. But the church cannot see the heart, and therefore cannot tell who are and who are not Christians; but it can see the life, and can determine who give evidence of being Christians, and who do not. This is the church's limit; it can go no farther, and those who give scriptural evidence of Christian character are to be admitted by the church, and those who do not are to be rejected. This character consists in experience and life. If a Christian experience is sustained by a Christian life, the evidence is good; if not, it is bad. The determination can only be made intelligently on a knowledge of the experience and life of the per-

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son judged. The life consists in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ.

A local church, congregation, or society, can have such a knowledge of its members, and those who may wish to become members, as would enable it to judge intelligently of their Christian character, but can have no such knowledge of the Christian character of the members of the other churches of the same denomination. This is impossible. How then shall the members of any local church or society commune with the members of their own denomination, who do not belong with them in the same place—in the same local church, etc.. and of whose Christian character they can know little or nothing? This is done in all denominations, so far as the writer knows. Baptists will commune with Baptists, Methodists with Methodists, Presbyterians with Presbyterians, etc.

The principle on which this is done is this: All these local churches, or societies, of the same denomination, have the same standard to test Christian character by—the very same; and if properly applied, in all places, would give the same assurance of Christian character. And as all the members are tested by the same standard. if it be properly applied, all would give the same evidence of fitness. If one be judged fit to commune, the others must also be so adjudged. This is the basis of denominational communion.

The only question to be settled is this: Is this

test standard properly applied throughout the denomination? If it be, every difficulty is removed to denominational communion; if it be not, the communion is hindered or improperly taken. The evidence that this test standard is properly applied, rests on two things: denominational faith and Christian charity. So far as the members of the different churches or societies know their common standard is properly applied, and if in any case it is not, there are provisions to have the evil remedied, and in the judgement of charity they have a right to believe it is properly applied everywhere. This frees the subject of denominational communion from all embarrassment.

It remains to be considered on what principle shall the members of different denominations commune with each other.

Open communionists generally give an invitation to the members of all evangelical churches who are in good standing in their several churches to come to the communion, but seldom or never define what they mean by evangelical. This invitation may contain the correct principle, but it is hard to see, seldom seen clearly, and often not seen at all. The different denominations may be, and generally are, acquainted with each other's test standards of Christian character, and the fidelity with which they are applied. If they judge each other's standards to be substantially Christian, and have evidence that they are honestly applied,

then. and in all such cases, there is no difficulty.—The members of different denominations, who regard each other's test standards as substantially Christian, pass muster by an honest drill, under a Christian standard, and have quite as good evidence of each other's Christian character, as the members of the same denomination have of one another's, who do not live in the same place, and may with as much propriety commune with each other. This principle all can see. It is the very same on which the membership of the same denomination, not personally acquainted with each other, can properly commune together. The principle is, *evidence of Christian character*. It is the same, the very same, in both cases.

The evidence we have of christian character in the case of the members of the local church or society to which we belong is this : a knowledge of their spirit and daily walk. The evidence we have of the christian character of those of our own denomination, who live not within the bounds of our acquaintance, and members of other denominations whose test standards we approve is this : they have submitted their spirit and lives to the test of what we acknowledge to be a christian standard ; and to its application by those who know them as well as we know the members of our local church or society, and who, we have good reason to believe, have fairly and honestly applied it ; and by this standard, thus applied, they stand approved.

This is just as satisfactory in the case of members of other religious denominations, as in that of our own. The principle is the very same.

But we cannot commune with the members of churches whose standards of christian character fall below what we judge the gospel requires.—For we have no means of determining christian character, but by personal knowledge of individuals, or the fact that they are approved by some correct standard of character, fairly and properly applied; and if the standard be not in our estimation, a christian one—is below a christian standard, the endorsement by such a standard could be no evidence of christian character, and affords no ground of christian communion.

There are many churches which admit slaveholders to membership; and some others which do not. Those who admit them, admit they can be Christians; for none but Christians have, or can have a right to membership in the church of Christ; and if they can be Christians, then slave-holding is compatible with Christian character, "the highest style of man," and is not a very bad thing; for what ever permits man to reach his purest state here, and his highest destiny hereafter, cannot be an evil in the sense of sin, any more than poverty or lameness, or any other providential affliction or physical infirmity, is sin; and ought not to be a ground of church discipline. Those who deny slaveholders church membership, charge that they are

not Christians—more that they cannot be; for if they could be, they might be; and Christians have a christian right to membership in the christian church; and to refuse them the enjoyment of this right, would be to rebel against the eternal founder of that church, and to sin. They are denied membership not because slavery is an evil of some sort, and slaveholders are generally wicked; but because it is "a sin *per se*," and those who practice it are sinners, and are not Christians—more, cannot be while they are slave-holders. This is the true issue between these churches. Nothing but want of christian character can rightfully deprive a person of church membership; and nothing but christian character can entitle him to it. For a church to acknowledge that persons are, or may be Christians whom they refuse membership, or that they are not, nor cannot be Christians, whom they admit to this relation, is to acknowledge it is not the church of Christ. For the church can only bind and loose whom he binds and looses. She is his spouse and is subject unto him.

Churches which thus differ, have formed a gulf of separation, over which their members can never pass to commune with each other, without a forfeiture of christian character. They do not acknowledge each other to be christian churches.—They are not agreed as to the test standard of christian character; and to pass muster, by ever so honest a drill, under a false standard, can be no

evidence of christian character, and without such evidence, there can be no christian communion; for upon this evidence this communion is based. Christianity is its basis, and evidence of christian character is all the evidence we have, or can have, that any persons are Christians. For those who believe that slave-holding is a sin *per se*, to commune in churches who admit slave-holders to membership in them, is not a solemn, but a *barefaced profanation of this ordinance of God.* They commune with those whom they hold are not, nor can not be Christians, while they remain slave-holders; this is not Christian communion—themselves being judges. And even the non-slave-holders of such a church receive their characters from a standard the others pronounce Anti-Christian; and if the standard be condemned, the certificate it gives, must be condemned also. But this is not all, they live in the constant fellowship of sinners, if slavery be a sin *per se*, which is a continued violation of that plain command: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."—Eph. v. 11., which is no personal evidence of christian character. And to commune with those they do not admit to be Christians, is not christian communion, but the communion of sinners, of Christ, in the person of his saints, with Belial, in the person of his sinners, the only communion there can be between Christ and Belial—more the communion of

Devils, when slave-holders are mixed up in it. For if "slavery be the sum of all villainies" then are slave-holders the impersonation of all crimes, and to commune with them is to commune with the worst of sinners. Such a communion is wicked. Churches, which make certain things conditions of membership, may commune with the members of other churches, which do the same things, and the members of these different churches may commune with each other, and meet the sanction of heaven; for they may be honest; but here we must stop. To commune in churches, or with the members of churches, which admit persons to membership who are guilty of practices which would keep them out of our church, or exclude them if they were in, is to hold fellowship with those we refuse to acknowledge to be Christians. We give the heirs of wrath a place in the house of God—the wolves of hell a home in the sheep-fold of Christ. Or we fellowship and live in a church which deprives God's children of a place in his house—of their christian rights; for if those our church refuses membership to, are Christians, and give scriptural evidence of christian character, then is our church wrong, and we ought to leave it. Christians ought not to be members of a church that refuses God's children a home in it, nor of one that gives the Devil's children church relations.

From these considerations this conclusion follows that christian communion must be confined

to the members of the same denomination, and to the members of other denominations, who adopt the same or substantially the same test standards of christian character. Within this limit, it may be christian communion, or it may not be; for those who thus agree, may or may not be Christians. But when forced beyond these bounds it must cease to be christian communion, and become the communion of sinners; for the parties radically differ, and cannot be one in Christ; and when saints commune with sinners, they sin, and in that act become sinners, so the communion is the communion of sinners.

Holding these views, we cannot commune in any church, or with the members of any church, which admits slaveholders to membership or communion. Believing that slavery is a sin *per se*, and that no slave-holder can be a Christian, we cannot commune with him. And what is true of slavery, is true of any other practice plainly forbidden by the word of God. Churches ought to adopt no tests of membership, but such as Scripture requires; and to commune with none who do not come up to the requirements of the Holy Scriptures.

If the views of christian communion, advanced in this Tract, be correct, and it would be much easier to find fault than to disprove the positions taken, how can any honest Anti-Slavery or Anti-Masonic Christian, remain in the fellowship of

those churches which admit to membership slave-holders and Free Masons? If slave-hold ng be extortion, (as it most undoubtedly is.) Christians are expressly forbidden to commune with extortioners, and consequently, with slave-holders. See 1st Cor. v. 8 to 12. And if Free Masonry be an unfruitful work of darkness, then Cl ristiar s must have no fellowship with it. See Eph. v. 11. And whether these positions be true or not, Anti-Slavery and Anti-Masonic Christians honestly believe they are, and their honest faith must be the rule of their duty; and they cannot remain in the fellowship of such churches without doing what they themselves believe God, the Lord, forbids; and if they knowingly disobey God, they sin, and must perish unless they repent; and they cannot repent in these cases, without leaving their churches; hence they must leave to save their souls. From this conclusion there is no escape.

We beg, we pray, our Christian friends, who may read this little Tract, to look at this awful subject in the fear of God and the light of his Word; and then determine what duty is, and do it.

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